

# Welcome Aboard: Identification of US Navy/Marine s Birdstrikes at the Smithsonian Institution



Smithsonian  
National Museum of Natural History

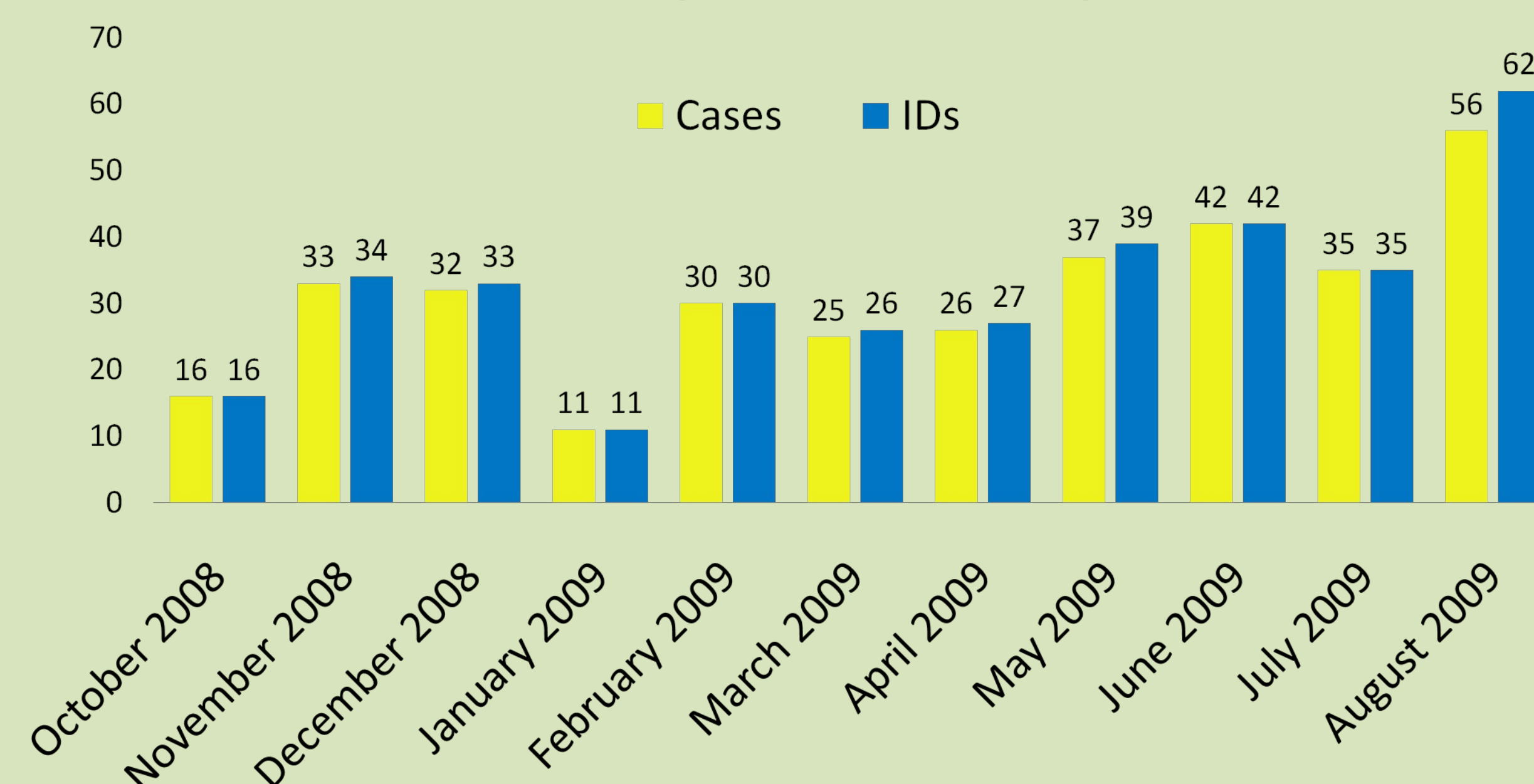


James Whatton, Carla Dove, Marcy Heacker, Faridah Dahlan  
Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History, Feather Identification Lab

## INTRODUCTION

Roxie Laybourne, founder of the Feather Identification Lab (FIL) and Pioneer of Forensic Ornithology, provided identifications for the US Navy on a contractual basis until 2003. The current interagency agreement with Navy Region Southeast operates on an annual basis and allows for birdstrike identification services for the entire US Navy and Marine Corps. The protocol to have birdstrike remains identified calls for an electronic WESS (Web Enabled Safety System) report to be filed and the bird remains to be sent to the Smithsonian. Once the wildlife remains are identified, the information is sent to the Navy Safety Center at Norfolk, VA where the information is entered into WESS. Field personnel who send the remains are also informed of the identifications.

### # of Cases and IDs per month for US Navy/Marine Corps



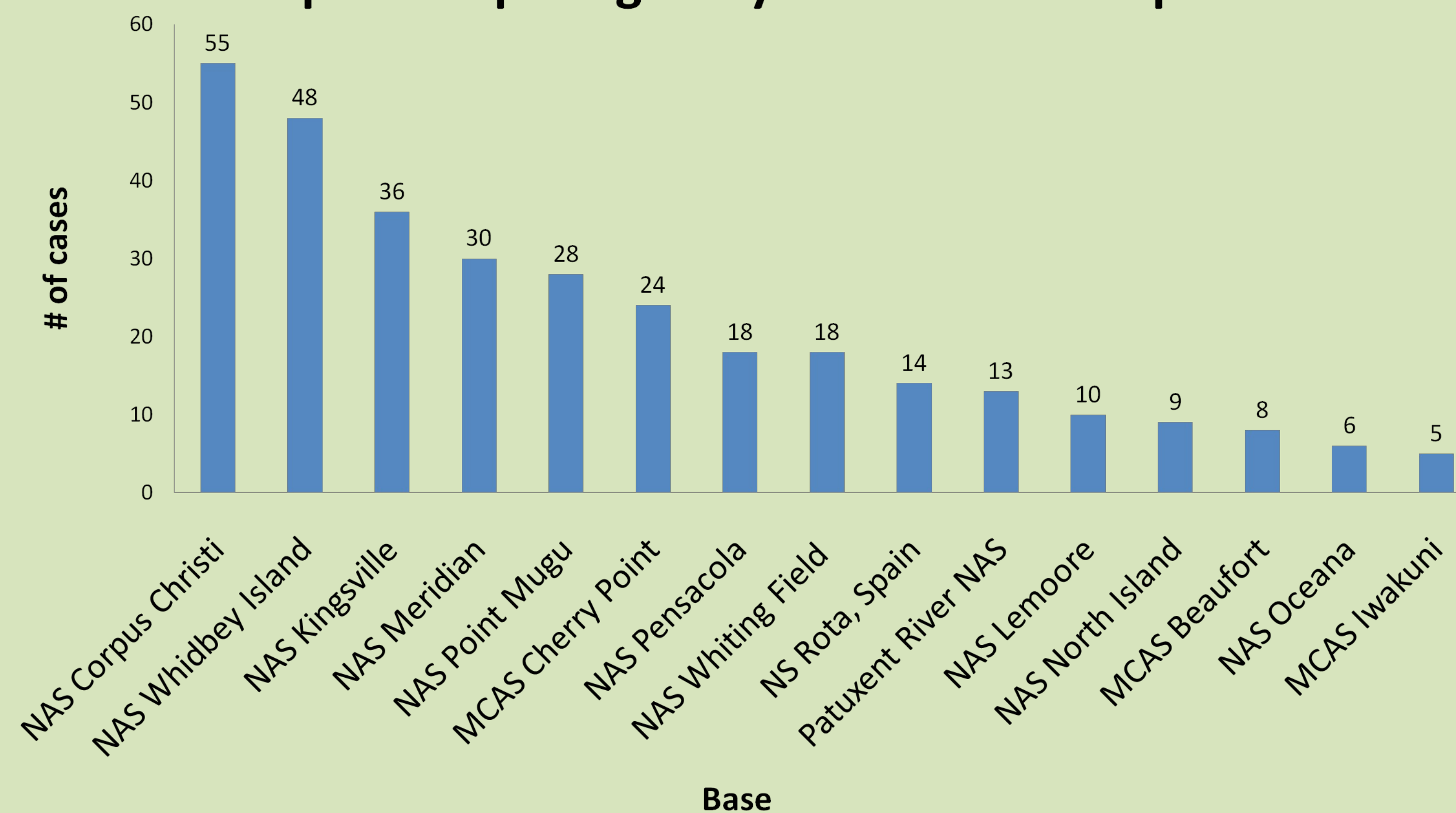
**Figure 1.**

Case breakdown by month for wildlife strikes sent in by US Navy and Marine Corps personnel. The number of cases is represented by yellow and the number of identifications is represented in blue.

## Importance of collecting and sending wildlife remains to FIL

- FIL has many tools to identify all types of remains including a large reference collection of specimens, microscopic slides and a DNA laboratory
- FIL stores all cases for a minimum of 3 years and can review identifications
- FIL has the ability to examine past birdstrike cases or implement new technology as it becomes available (i.e. stable isotope analysis for migratory status, DNA sexing for numbers of individuals).
- Confirming field identifications provides more accurate

### Top Participating Navy and Marine Corps Bases



**Figure 2.**

Leading Navy and Marine Corps bases participating in the partnership by sending in remains to the FIL. The number of cases sent in by each bases is on the y-axis.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Since the agreement began in October 2008, Navy personnel have sent in **a total of 343 cases** with 355 samples (Fig. 1). A great majority of the remains have been submitted as "textbook" examples of collecting birdstrike remains. Proper collection of remains is important for the FIL to obtain the most specific ID possible.

Birdstrike remains came from **24 installations** and were collected by a variety of Navy, USDA Biologists, and Marine Corps personnel. The top participating base are shown in Figure 2.

Identification methods used for Navy/Marine cases included: whole feathers (39%), DNA analysis (36%), feather microstructure (14%). Eleven percent (11%) of the cases involved using multiple ID methods - **emphasizing the importance of collecting a variety of material.**

Wildlife species identified most frequently (Fig. 3) are consistent with those involved in US Air Force and civil birdstrikes. We have identified 132 species of wildlife (89% to species level).

There have been 10 damaging cases (Class A, B, or C) in which

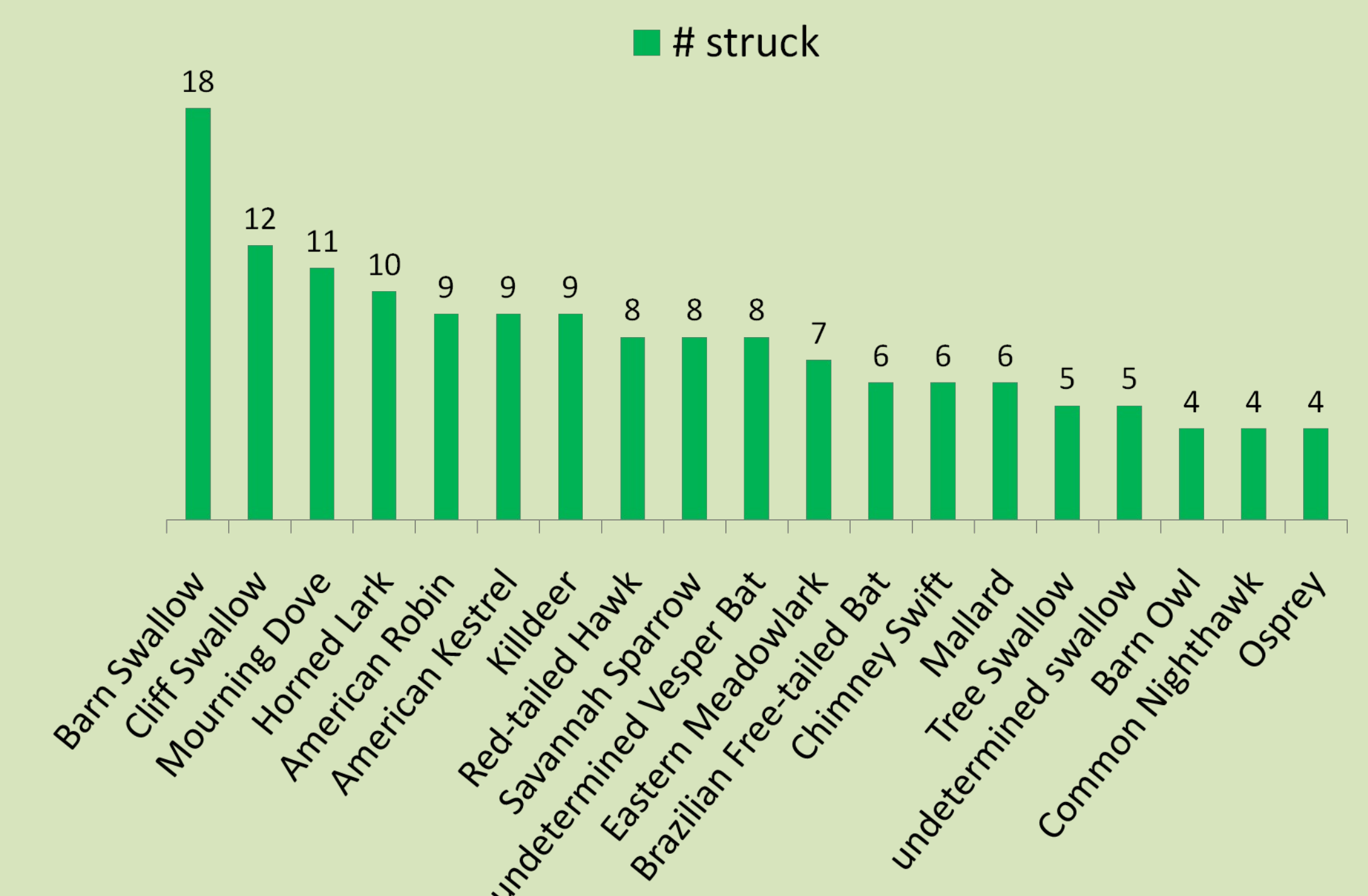
## DISCUSSION

Based on the current analysis, we predict that FIL will receive more than 400 birdstrike cases from the Navy/Marine Corps in the first year of the interagency agreement, an impressive number that can be accredited to the proactive participation of Navy personnel in the field who are doing an outstanding job of recognizing and collecting wildlife remains after a strike.

We also predict that reporting will likely increase as more people are familiar with the service. The US Navy is now developing its first BASH instruction for birdstrike issues and plans to require the following: 1) reporting all wildlife strikes into WESS; 2) collecting and submitting all birdstrike remains for identification by SI-FIL.

Participation in the new agreement between US Navy/SI-FIL is a critical way to show the need for this type of species identification service and provide accurate data to field biologists who implement BASH management plans. The FIL hopes the partnership will to continue to grow and will provide valuable information to Navy and Marine Corps personnel.

### Most Commonly Struck Wildlife to Navy/Marine Corps Aircraft



**Figure 3.**

Most commonly struck wildlife to Navy/Marine Corps aircraft. The identifications include all remains identified to at least family.